

GHTON, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the U.S., for the Southern District of New York







I.

BACK in the days of good Queen Bess,
Old England's maiden Queen,
There lived a fair and loving pair,
Whose like was seldom seen.
Where Norfolk fronts the northern sea,
A shire of down and wood,

In pleasant Norwich by the Yare, Their happy dwelling stood.

A man of wealth the husband was, In houses and in lands, Which long his family had owned,

And held with hoarding hands, Increasing through the thrifty years, Until to him they came;

Such was this English gentleman, Who bore an honored name.

His wife, who in her youth has been The beauty of the shire, Whom once an Earl has wooed in vain,

And many a country squire,
Is younger than her graver lord,
Beneath whose eyes she grows,

Rare as the royal flower of June, Each hour sees more a rose.

In dear old Norwich by the Yare They had a rich estate,

A noble mansion girt with trees,
Beside Saint Austin's gate.

Above the oaks you caught a glimpse Of chimneys broad and tall, Of dormer-windows, gable ends,

The gilded vane-o'er all!

Between the pillars of the gate
The garden-walks were seen,
Trim hedges, clipped and formal yews,
The terrace, high and green;
Bay-windows reaching to the ground,

Where shade and sunshine slept, And here and there the massive walls, Up which the ivy crept.

In this ancestral home of peace
They passed their wedded hours:

They guessed 't was winter by the wind,
And summer by the flowers;
But summer, winter, was the same,

To-day, the day before:
The only change was in their hearts,
Where love was more and more.

If any wish was unfulfilled,
Unanswered any prayer,
It was the anxious gentleman's,
That Heaven would send an heir,
To hold his houses and his lands,

To bear his ancient name; A young Sir Arthur, like himself.

One summer day he came!

Tears filled the happy father's eyes, The new-made mother smiled: There never was so blest a pair,

Nor half so fair a child!

"Who shall we name him after, sweet?
Your brother Will, or Hugh?"

"Nothing but Arthur, good, my lord,

For he is just like you!"

IX.

Dearly Sir Arthur loved the boy,
Whose little piping cry
Was music to him, and who hid
All heaven in his blue eye!
He watched him in his nurse's arms,
And in his cradled sleep;

And grew so rich with granted hopes
That he forgot to weep!

X.

The tiny hands that touched his brow Effaced the furrows there;

And — was it noon that lit his face,

Or only baby's hair?

O rare it was to see the two
From morn to night at play,
While mother plied her needle near,
As grave as they were gay!

When summers three had left their light
In young Sir Arthur's curls,
Another baby came from heaven,
A very bud of girls!

The kinsmen to the christening flocked,
A long and merry train:

They gave the child her mother's name —
The little Lady Jane!

It was a pretty sight to see
The children as they grew,
How beautiful young Arthur was,
And what the boy could do!
He knew the portraits on the wall,
Could call them each by name,
Stern gentlemen in coats of mail,

And many a stately dame.

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XIII.

And, romping with his father, he
Could hide and not be seen,
Except the golden head that peeped
Around the painted screen;
Could ride to London on a cane,
And play at battledoor:
So wise a little gentleman
Was never known before!

XIV.

And she, the girl, was wiser still,
For, ere a year had flown,
She mocked the mewing of the cat,
And nearly walked alone!
She loved her image in the glass,
But eyed with fear and scorn
The huntsman on the tapestry,
With horse, and hounds, and horn.

XV.

In summer days the children played Together on the lawn, Around the statues in the walks Of goddess, nymph, and faun; Or by the fountain, where, in heat, The lazy Triton lay,

And blew the water through his shell, And cooled himself with spray.

XVI.

Be sure they strayed among the flowers, Nor heard the gardener call; Or where the fruit-trees sunned themselves

Along the southern wall; The peaches and the apricots Hung dangling in the air:

They brushed the mist from off the plum,
And plucked the Katharine pear.

Perhaps they marked the glittering vane That veered from east to west,

Above the twisted chimney-stalks, Where swallows built their nest: They saw them darting in and out,

They saw them darting in and out,
With bits of moss and straw;

And rooks fly home, when eve was come, With noisy " Caw! Caw! Caw!" XVIII.

On winter nights, when winds were loud, And roaring fires were made, And little Jane was fast asleep,

And in her cradle laid;

Then Arthur climbed his father's knee, Who sat before the hearth, And, hearkening to his prattle, smiled, And shared his childish mirth.

When curfews rung, Mamma would sit Beside her lord and son,

And two white hands between their chairs Would soon be locked as one. They stared in silence at the fire,
In joy akin to pain,
And leaf by leaf the rose of youth
Came back to Lady Jane.

Sir Arthur with a sudden sigh
Bent down and kissed her hand;
At last they talked, but not in words
The boy could understand;
So, while his father felt his hair,
(His touch was like the snow,)
He watched the logs, upon the dogs,

The bed of coals below.

XXI.

"I think you're better, love, to-night."
"Oh, much," she said, "my dear.
And you?"—"I should be well enough,
If only Spring were here!"

The fire threw up a blaze of light,
Which filled the dusky room;
Then suddenly the brands went out,

And all was lost in gloom.

XXII.

There was a wedding in the town
One doubtful April day;
A solemn service in the Church,
A feast where all were gay.

The bride his kin, Sir Arthur went,
And with him Lady Jane;

"I was late at night when they returned, And in a chilly rain.

XXIII.

When day within their chamber broke, The children, hastening there,

To give and get their morning kiss, And say their simple prayer, Reheld their parents still in hed

Beheld their parents still in bed, Too ill, alas, to rise;

With fever-flushes on their cheeks, And languor in their eyes!

Disordered lay their rich attire,
Plucked off the night before;

Sir Arthur's purple Spanish cloak Had fallen on the floor;

His hat near by, its plume, unlooped,
About the crumpled crown;

His rapier on the oak buffet, Beside his watch — run down!

XXV.

The kiss was given, the prayer was heard,

The children crept away;
Their first light grief, if grief it were,
Was soon forgot in play.

Slow passed the day, in broken sleep, And restless hours of pain.

"How is your fever, Arthur, now?"
"I'll soon be well again."

XXVI.

The next day they were worse: the next Still worse — too ill to see

The children when they came, yet each Did better feign to be;

Talked hopefully, and wore a smile, When sad enough to weep;

And each, to make the other rest, Would seem to fall asleep.

When she had closed her eyes awhile, That grew more sweet and dim,

My lady to her lord would turn, And steal a look at him,

To find him looking back at her, With great tears on his cheek;

Then both in silence wept, and wept, Too full of woe to speak.

XXVIII.

One morning, while his poor wife slept, Sir Arthur roused and said,

"What think you, doctor, shall I live?"
The doctor shook his head.

A groom was called, who, mounting fast, Was soon upon his way,

To seek his master's brother, charged
To fetch him there that day.

'T was dusk before the brother came, So far he had to ride.

He found Sir Arthur propped in bed, His lady by his side;

Young Arthur near his father stood, Whose eyes were on the boy;

Her mother's arms were round the girl, Who fingered still a toy.

"Dear brother,"—so Sir Arthur spoke, And shook his brother's hand,

"Why I have sent for you to-day, You well may understand. I have not long to live;"—he stopped; Then, taking heart again,

Went on: "You see my little ones,
My Arthur, and my Jane;
XXXI.

"I've left the boy — (Sir Arthur soon!)
(The will is drawn, and here,)
When he to perfect age shall come,
Three hundred pounds a year.

And to my little daughter Jane,
(Poor thing! not three years old!)
To be paid down on marriage day,
Five hundred pounds in gold.

"If they should die, their wealth — but you Know how the law doth run.

And, brother, it was not my fault I was the elder son.

I 've left you something, and your wife A trifle, too, will find;

Enough to buy a mourning ring, To keep me still in mind!

"And, brother," said the dying man,

Who now was nigh his end,
"Be kind unto my boy and girl,

They have no other friend!

My helpless orphans I commit
To God and you this day:

But little time be sure we have
Within this world to stay.

world to stay.

"You must be father and mother both, And uncle all in one:

God knows what will become of them, When I am dead and gone!"

"O brother!" said their mother then, Whose breath was faint and slow,

"You are the man must bring our babes — Ah me! — to weal, or woe!

XXXV.

If you are kind and good to them,
As sure you ought to be,
God will reward you; but if not—

Remember, God will see!"
"God never prosper me, nor mine,"
The wretched uncle said,

"If I do wrong your children dear, When you, alas, are dead!"

They kissed the children twice or thrice, Who wept, they knew not why;

Then, turning over, face to face, They laid them down to die;

Clasped in each other's loving arms, With lips together pressed,

Their pure and perfect spirits passed To God's eternal rest!

the same

WHEN all was past, — the long array
That swept by halls and bowers,
Bearing two coffins, side by side,
Whose lids were heaped with flowers;

When prayers were said, and hymns were sung, The last, last look was given, And what was Earth's returned to Earth, And what was Heaven's to Heaven;

II.

XXXVIII.

The uncle took the orphans home,
Not to their darkened Hall,
But to his own house, where, till then,
Did never shadow fall.
He lived in Yarmouth by the sea
Some twenty miles away;
A fishing town, along the Yare,
Where ships at anchor lay.

XXXIX.

In no manorial hall he dwelt,
Which lawns and parks surround,
But in a plain and homely house,
Which stood on open ground:
Some pollard willows set in front,
Perhaps a stunted yew;
The grass was barren as the sand,
Wherein it sparsely grew.

XL

For orchard there were straggling trees, In shade behind the house, All blown one way by ocean winds, That shook their fruitless boughs. No dove before the mossy cote, To show his burnished breast; Only in the tall apple-tree A robin built his nest.

XLI.

Within, no armor on the wall,
No antlers o'er the door;
No carven chairs, nor carpets rare,
But rushes on the floor:
Branches of coral on the hearth,
And many a wreathed horn,
Still murmuring of the southern seas,
Its lips all red with morn.

XLII.

When hither first the children came, All was so strange and new,
They stared about them, half afraid,
Not knowing what to do.
Where Arthur went his sister went,
Her tiny hand in his;
Silent all day, at night they cried
To have the nightly kiss.

XLIII.

Their aunt stole softly to the bed,
And soothed them as they wept;
They dried their tears, they said their prayers,
And soon like blossoms slept.
Grown more at home; they houses built
Of cards upon the floor;
Or held a shell against their ears,
To hear its hollow roar.

XLIV

Or, playing in the orchard, sought
The tallest apple-tree,
Where sat the robin on her nest,
Whose breast they just could see,
Brooding above her five blue eggs,
Among the fluttering boughs,
A patient little wife, who waits
The coming of her spouse;

XLV.

Who, whether days be dark or bright,
Is whistling, whistling still;
He brings her berries, fruit, and seed,
And drops them in her bill.
"When we shall cherries have again,
Let's fetch it some," said Jane:
A twittered "Thank you," from the bird,
No words could be more plain.

XLVI

Before the house the river ran,
The many-winding Yare;
A long bridge crossed it on the left,
The town itself was there,
Low lying on a slip of beach,
Which towards the water dips,
Old, time-dark buildings, and, beyond,
The masts and spars of ships.

XLVII.

Further, the basin of the sea,
Blue-dark, and rough with wind,
Where ships came in from foreign lands,
Or left the land behind,
With snowy sails, and colored flags,
And sailors on the shrouds;
Above, the ocean of the sky,
Where sailed great fleets of clouds.

XLVIII.

The uncle had a counting-house,
(A foreign merchant, he,)
Whereto he took the little ones
To look upon the sea;
Their cousins, perched on high-legged stools,
Were writing all the day;
The air was heavy with the scent
Of countries far away.

XLIX.

When evening came, and lamps were lit,
The boy would climb his knee,
To hear him tell of sailor-men,
And ships that sailed the sea;
Meanwhile his wife, who o'er the house
A careful watch did keep,
Would hold the girl upon her lap,
Until she dropped asleep.









Τ,.

At dawn the pretty orphans rose,
And pattered down the stairs,
To where their aunt and uncle lay,
To say their morning prayers:
The wakeful uncle heard their steps,
How soft soe'er they crept,
And — what were their weak prayers to him? —
Upon the instant slept!

T T

When first they came to live with him,
His heart, being newly wrung
With sorrow for his brother's death,
Whom he had loved when young,
Was touched with pity for their loss,
And felt their helpless state;
And if he did not love them then,
At least he did not hate.

LII.

He could not but remember, though,
And darkliest when alone,
That Arthur held a rich estate
Which might have been his own:
So, though he did not hate the boy,
Be sure he liked him less,
Looking on him as one who crossed
His path of happiness.

LIII.

Moodily in his counting-house
He wasted many a day,
Watching the sea with idle eyes —
The flocks of gulls at play:
He saw them falling in the waves,
And rising in the sky:
At last he dropped his pen, and thought,
"Perhaps the lad may die!"

T.T.V

He would not let him climb his knee,
Beside the chimney-nook,
But sent him to his aunt, while he
Was busy with a book:
Little, indeed, he seemed to read,
But sat in listlessness;
And, eying the poor child askance,
He liked him less and less.

LV.

One night he tossed the book aside,
And paced the ghostly room,
Then walking to the rattling sash,
Stared out into the gloom:
Sullen and heavy lay the sea,
No star was in the sky,
Yet he beheld the wheeling bats
As they went glimmering by.

T.VT

While standing there he is aware
Of something in the night:
At first 't is rather felt than seen,
At last it comes in sight!
It draws towards him through the dark,
It sails without a wing;
It is a blacker Night in night
An evil, evil Thing!

LVII.

He stands a moment horrified,
Then starts, as well he may,
And drops the curtain hastily,
To keep the Thing away!
He cannot—'t is before him still,
And when he steals apart,
It follows him,—oh, wretched man!
And now—'t is in his heart!

LVIII.

Meanwhile the lonesome little ones,
So loving and so good,
Disliked, neglected, in the house,
Went wandering where they would.
When, late that year, the cherries came,
Though sweet as sweet could be,
They strewed the tempting few they had
Around the robins' tree.

LIX

The mother-robin warmed no more
Her store of eggs, for they
Were hatched at last, — five clamorous young,
Which hungered all the day:
She gleaned the fields, she sacked the trees,
To fill each gaping bill,
And though she brought them fruit and seed,
They hungered, clamored still.

tχ.

"How sweet the cherries are!" said one,
Who hopped from bough to stem;
"The children are so good to us,
We must be good to them."
He spied the light above his head,
And clambering, fluttering there,
Shook down a shower of golden leaves,
Which lodged on Arthur's hair.

LXI.

Between the river and the sea
There was a dingy street,
Where ale was sold in taverns old,
And sailors used to meet:
Above the doors were swinging signs
Of ships with swelling sails;
A mermaid here, a dolphin there,
And there the spout of whales.

LXII.

Hither the children, hand in hand,
In little suits of black,
Would stray on summer afternoons,
With none to call them back.
Before the open doors they saw
The sailors swig their ale:
One roared a song of Mall and Meg,
Another told his tale.

LXIII.

Bold fellows all, whose faces bore
The brand of southern suns;
Who oft against the Spanish forts
Had manned their English guns!
One held a parrot on his wrist,
He brought from far Brazil:
It pecked his hand. Said little Jane,
"It has an ugly bill!"

LXIV

Puffing the while his Indian pipe,
Whence wreaths of smoke up-curled,
He told how he with Cavendish
Had sailed around the world:
How, later, they had burnt a town,
And captured the St. Anne,
A Spanish galleon, crammed with gold,—
He was a lucky man!

LXV.

How Francis Drake from Plymouth sailed, A dozen years before, And pillaged Chili and Peru — The whole Pacific shore, And took a royal galleon, Was loaded down with plate: Of this, and more, another bragged, Beside a master's mate.

Y MINTY

A third, who thrice had fought with Drake,
And hoped to fight again,
Was in the great Armada fight,
Which broke the power of Spain.
"Ho! Margery, wench, fill every can!"
(It was a captain spake,)
"A health to our Vice-Admiral!
Long life to Francis Drake!"

LXVII

Spying the children at the door,
Cried one, "Come here, my girl."
She went: he fumbled in his fob,
And handed her a pearl.
Another gave the boy some shells,
A third a costly stone.
The uncle took them all at night—
To save till they were grown!

LXVII

He had not kept these pretty babes
A twelvemonth and a day,
Before he called his careful wife,
And thus to her did say:
"I have been thinking much, of late,
About these children dear,
And have made up my mind that they
Must stay no longer here.

LXIX.

This life of ours is good enough,
Sweet wife, for you and me,
And for our boys, who, like ourselves,
Are used to poverty;
But not for them, for they were born
To riches and renown:
I have a friend will bring them up—
He lives in London town."

LXX

The days went by till one dark morn,
When summer was at wane,
They heard a voice which wakened them,
With, "Arthur, come, and Jane."
It was their aunt, who bade them rise,
And dress without delay;
They were to go to London straight,
They would be there that day!

LXXI.

Waiting below were two rough men
They had not seen before,
Whose caps were pulled about their brows,
And each a dagger wore:
The uncle walked with them apart,
And did a parley hold:
At last he gave them stealthily
What seemed a bag of gold!

LXXII.

"Come now, sweet master, we must go;
And come, my pretty miss."
Their aunt embraced them tenderly,
And gave them both a kiss.
The treacherous uncle kissed them too,
And fondly smoothed their hair:
But in his cold and cruel eyes
There was a murderous glare!

LXXIII.

They started, not along the road
That ran before the house,
But westward, through the orchard-paths,
Among the barren boughs.
The robins saw them as they passed,
And one, the boldest, said,
"I mean to keep the men in sight,"
And flew away o'erhead.

LXXIV.

O dreary, dreary was the sky,
And weary was the way,
Across the low and marshy lands,
Where pools of water lay,
That never rippled in the wind,
Nor danced with summer showers,
Yellow and muddy, green with scum,
And shot with sickly flowers.

LXXV.

A marshy country, flat and dead,
Where little grew but reeds,
And stiff, rank grass that ne'er was cropped —
Where Nature ran to weeds.
An aspen shook, and o'er a brook,
That glassed the darkening sky,
The willows swept their dripping leaves,
And wept as they went by!

LXXVI.

But cheerily the children went,
And prattled merrily,
Asking the men where London was,
And what they there should see.
And he whom Arthur walked beside,
With muddy, splashing feet,
Replied, "The river full of boats,
And soldiers in the streets."

LXXVII.

And he that carried little Jane,
Who now was weary grown,
Promised the Lord Mayor in his coach,
The Queen upon her throne.
She leaned her head against his cheek
In such a loving wise,
That ere he was aware of it
The tears were in his eyes.

LXXVIII.

At last they reached a lonesome wood,
Where tangled pathways wound;
O'erhead a roof of darkest boughs,
And dead leaves on the ground;
No light stole in on darkest days,
To chase the nightlike gloom:
A spot to do a murder in,
So safe, and such a tomb!

LXXIX.

"This is the place," so Arthur's man,
To him who carried Jane,
Who, picking out a plot of moss,
Set down the girl again:
"Aye," said the other, moodily,
"T is black as his bad heart."
Then, while he bade the children play,
He drew his mate apart.

LXXX.

"The more I think of this," he said,
"The more it seems to me
A deed too foul for men to do,
And useless, too, d' ye see?
We 've got the money safe in hand,
So where would be the good?
My counsel is, we leave them here
To perish in the wood."

LXXXI.

The second ruffian, swaggering loud,
Declared 't was not his way —
No coward he — to shirk his work,
When he had taken his pay.
"You'll spare the girl?" the other asks,
Who now his dagger draws;
"My little sister looked just so
When I went to the wars!"

LXXXII.

"You in the wars!" his comrade sneered,
"You know, as well as I,
You never handled pike or gun,
Or heard the bullets fly.
I know you well, my roaring blade,
Let's see, where did we meet?
The Savoy, or the Marshalsea?
I guess 't was in the Fleet."

LXXXIII

The soldier answered angrily,
"It little matters where:
The lass and lad shall not be hurt,
You shall not touch a hair."
They clutched each other at the word,
And tugged, on murder bent:
The children trembled at the sight,
And wondered what it meant.

LXXXIV.

They struggled in the tangled paths,
And up and down the wood,
Each holding by the other's throat,
And stabbing where he could.
At last into the villain's heart
The soldier's dagger rips;
Heavily falls the wretch, and dies,
A curse upon his lips!

LXXXV.

When he had got his breath again,
Still bleeding from the fight,
The murderer dragged the murdered man
Beyond the children's sight,
Amid the dreadful shadows, where
He covered it with boughs;
When he returned, great drops of sweat
Were standing on his brows.

LXXXVI

"I killed him, that he should not you;
The fool would have it so.
But come, we must be marching on,
For we have far to go."
He stooped and lifted Jane once more,
Who, troubled in her mind,
No longer liked him as before;
And Arthur walked behind.

LXXXVII.

He led them up, he led them down,
And round the gloomy wood,
Till little Jane, who hungry was,
Began to ask for food.
"There is," he said, "a town near by,
I see its steeples plain;
Stay here, and I will bring you bread,
When I come back again."

LXXXVIII

He disappeared among the copse,
Which here the pathway crossed,
Nor did they dare to follow him,
For fear of being lost;
But taking courage by and by,
They wandered up and down,
But could not see the man again
Approaching from the town.

LXXXIX.

They waited long and patiently,
And hungered more for bread;
So Jane went picking blackberries,
With lips and fingers red,
While Arthur gathered hips and haws,
And shook the wild grapes down;
But nevermore they saw the man
Approaching from the town.

XC.

The lagging hours seemed lost that day,
Astray in some strange land;
Still, up and down the lonesome wood
They wandered, hand in hand,
Till darker grew its dreadful gloom,
For now the night was nigh:
Then Arthur said, "Let's make a bed,"
And Jane began to cry.

XCI

The owlet hooted close at hand,
The nighthawk called its brood;
(Ah, why was there no raven near,
To fetch the children food?)
Then Arthur made his sister's bed,
And close beside her crept,
And while she wept he said his prayers;
At last the children slept.

XCII

That night the uncle had a dream,
Which shook his soul with fear:
His brother's spirit came to him,
So sad, and so severe!
And, just at dawn, his sister, too,
And stood beside his bed.
"Where are the children?" "Gone away."
And they: "Not so, but dead!"

XCIII.

When night was fading from the wood,
The faithful robins came,
So many, and with breasts so bright,
The trees were all a-flame!
They flew in flocks from out the east,
Which wore its morning-red,
To where the poor, dear children lay,
Amid the darkness — dead!

XCIV

Locked in each other's little arms,
Hushed, pale, and icy chill;
The night-dew heavy on their hair,
Their hearts forever still!
"They must not lie uncovered here,"
The piteous robins said,
Who straight began with simple rites
The burial of the dead!

XCI

They flew to east, they flew to west,
They gathered, one and all,
The prettiest leaves that they could find,
To make the children's pall:
With pious care they strewed the leaves
On cheek and brow and breast,
Till they had raised a funeral mound,
To mark their place of rest.

XCVI

How fared it with the uncle, pray,
Who thus his trust betrayed?
His barns were fired, his goods consumed,
His lands more barren made.
His friends became his enemies,
Or passed him coldly by;
And in a voyage to Portugal
One of his sons did die.

XCVII.

With tottering steps, and thin gray hair,
And features ghastly pale,
He walked the world, a ruined man,
Till he was thrown in jail;
Where soon he died, and awfully,
For near his pallet stood
The phantoms of two children fair —
The Children in the Wood!







